

bill, the government has decided to shackle us in a society where we are denied even our basic democratic rights," said one Dalit activist, who identified himself by the Christian name Emmanuel.

On Oct. 31, Tamil Nadu became the first—but probably not the last—Indian state to outlaw religious conversions. Though the law targets conversions "by force, allurements or fraudulent means," opponents say the language offers the means to challenge all conversions to faiths other than Hinduism.

"Even if one changes one's religion of one's own free will, those involved in the conversion can be punished on the ground that it's a case of forced conversion," said M. Karunanidhi, a former chief minister of Tamil Nadu.

The new law was welcomed by Hindu fundamentalists, who govern the nation in a coalition led by the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

"The BJP is strongly of the view that this law is most necessary for the whole country. Lots of money is coming into the country from Islamic organizations to aid conversions," said BJP President M. Venkai Naidu.

Ashok Singhal, leader of the World Hindu Council (VHP), hailed the law as a "timely and bold step" and he urged other states to pass similar laws.

The issue of religious conversion has long been a source of strife in India. While federal law allows Indians to change their faith, the ruling BJP makes no secret of its dislike to the practice, while its ruling partner—the VHP party—views conversions as betrayal.

Opponents of the new law warn it will only trigger an even larger exodus of Hindus to other faiths.

The Global Council of Indian Christians said it was "alarmed by the hurriedly promulgated ordinance," and called it "the most heinous violation of religious freedom aimed at targeting Christian missionaries engaged in poverty alleviation and spreading the light of education."

The All-Indian Christian People's Forum said that it went against the core of the Constitution. "This ordinance is uncalled for, unwarranted and smacks of a pro-Hindu ideological basis of the . . . government".

"The bill runs foul of Article 25 [25] of the Indian Constitution, which grants freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion to every Indian citizen," the group said.

Dominic Emmanuel, director of New Delhi Catholic Archdiocese, called the measure, "an assault as much on civil rights as on human rights as on human dignity."

John Daya, secretary-general of the Christian Council in New Delhi, said: "In fact the only inducements by fraud and fear are those being carried out by [Hindu organizations] in the tribal belt, where innocent tribals are being forced to become Hindus."

Muslims, too, are concerned.

How can conversions be prevented if an individual is attracted to another religion because of his or her faith in it? Force is never used to convert one to Islam because it is against the basic tenets of [Islam]," said Maolana Siddikullah Chowdhury, general secretary of the Jamiat-e-Ulema party in Calcutta.

He added that low-caste Hindus converted to Islam simply to "escape discrimination and ill treatment" and not under any coercion.

PAYING TRIBUTE TO: SILVERTON FIRE DISTRICT

HON. SCOTT MCINNIS

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, January 8, 2003

Mr. MCINNIS. Mr. Speaker, it is with great pride that I rise today to recognize the Silverton Fire District for their service and dedication during one of Colorado's most formidable fire seasons. Last summer, the Silverton Fire Department played an integral role in containing the Missionary Ridge forest fire that burned over 70,000 acres in Southwestern Colorado. Today, I would like to pay tribute to their heroic efforts before this body of Congress and this nation.

When the Missionary Ridge fire first erupted last June, the citizens of Durango, Bayfield and the surrounding communities called upon the Silverton Fire District to protect their loved ones, homes, and communities from what would become the worst fire in area history. The fire began in a ditch beside Missionary Ridge Road just 15 miles northeast of Durango and grew to consume more than 70,000 acres, 56 residences, and 27 outbuildings.

Although the Missionary Ridge fire was a devastating reminder of how destructive forest fires can be, it also served to remind us of the men and women who risk their lives to protect their fellow citizens on a daily basis. The Silverton Fire District has served the citizens of Colorado for many years and has a reputation for its outstanding service. The district relies upon the Chief and its fire fighters to remain on call, prepared to fight fires or provide medical assistance on a moment's notice.

Mr. Speaker, it is with sincere admiration that I recognize the Silverton Fire District before this body of Congress and this nation. I want to commend all of the Fire District's fire fighters for their determination, courage, and resolve during last summer's efforts on Missionary Ridge. Without the help of the Silverton Fire District and others, the added devastation to our community, environment, and quality of life would have been unimaginable. Their tireless commitment throughout the fire season has served as an inspiration to us all and it is an honor to represent such an outstanding group of Americans in this Congress.

IN HONOR OF NOAM SHUDOFSKY, ADMINISTRATOR OF RAMAZ DAY SCHOOL

HON. JERROLD NADLER

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, January 8, 2003

Mr. NADLER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to Noam Shudofsky on the occasion of his retirement as Administrator of Ramaz Day School, one of the finest religious schools in New York City. Mr. Shudofsky, a native New Yorker, was born and raised in my hometown, Brooklyn, where he attended the Yeshiva of Flatbush. He has since enjoyed a long and exemplary career as an educator in New York. It is my pleasure to honor him today.

In his role as Administrator of Ramaz, Mr. Shudofsky has helped to maintain the vision of

its founder, Rabbi Joseph Lookstein. He came to Ramaz in 1962, and has served as Administrator for 40 years. As Administrator, Mr. Shudofsky has managed the day to day operations of the school, and is responsible for the operational fund raising. His career at Ramaz has helped to make it the world-renowned institution that it is today.

In addition to his role as an educator, Mr. Shudofsky was a leader in the movement to free Soviet Jews from Communist oppression and permit their emigration to Israel, and was one of the first people to travel to the Soviet Union during that period. He has three children, and multiple grandchildren.

For his commitment to Jewish education, to his community and his city, and to the freedom of the Jewish people, it is my privilege to congratulate Mr. Shudofsky on this special occasion.

RECOGNITION OF IVORY LATTA

HON. JOHN M. SPRATT, JR.

OF SOUTH CAROLINA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, January 8, 2003

Mr. SPRATT. Mr. Speaker, this past week in my hometown, York, South Carolina, we made history Ivory Latta, standing all of 5 feet 6 inches in her shoes, set a new state scoring record in high school basketball, breaking the standing record of 3,427 points set by Allison Feaster, now a player for the Charlotte Sting.

Ivory was within reach of the record when York Comprehensive High School went up against East Forsyth High in the Dell Curry Basketball Shoot-Out in Charlotte, and she lost no time going after it. In the first 8 seconds of the game, she stole the ball and went in for a lay-up. She went on to score 52 points. This brought her career total to 3,439 points, more than any other player in our state, boy or girl, has ever scored. Since basketball season is far from over, Ivory will score more, and raise the bar even higher, before her high school career is finished.

Ivory Latta is a star in the classroom as well as on the basketball court. She has a grade point ratio of 3.9, and is headed for the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill on scholarship next fall.

I bring this young lady's feat to the attention of the House because I think we will be hearing a lot more from Ivory Latta as she takes her extraordinary skills and team-play spirit on to college and possibly into the pro's. As her congressman, I share Ivory Latta's story with you because I am immensely proud of her. So is everyone throughout the Carolinas, and not least in York, which has declared Friday, January 10, "Ivory Latta Day."

The following is an editorial tribute to Ivory Latta that appeared in The Herald in Rock Hill, South Carolina on January 8, 2003:

[From the Herald, Jan. 8, 2003]

LATTA DESERVES ACCOLADES

York's Ivory Latta now stands as the greatest high school basketball scorer, boy or girl, in South Carolina history, and the universal sentiment seems to be: It couldn't happen to a nicer kid.

On Friday, the day Latta reached and then exceed the scoring record, her biggest concern was her team. While she may be the spark plug for the York Comprehensive High School Lady Cougars, she is, first and foremost, a team player.